

THE VALLEY OF LILIES

Lisa, too, seems to have taken the habit. Another of the first of her companions was a certain Caterina di Ghetto (or Scetto), possibly the daughter of one of the Saint's brothers-in-law, one of the young unmarried women who, in imitation of Catherine, joined the Dominican tertiaries.

The earliest of Catherine's men followers were two young Dominicans: Fra Tommaso di Antonio Nacci Caffarini, a novice, then about seventeen years old, and Fra Bartolommeo di Domenico, who was slightly older and already a priest, and had been a companion in the novitiate with Fra Tommaso della Fonte. Next to Fra Raimondo, we owe most of our information about Catherine to the devotion of these two friars. It is possible that their first introduction to her, by Fra Tommaso della Fonte, was during the time of her strict seclusion and retreat in her cell, which still remained the centre of the spiritual life of all her fellowship.

Fra Bartolommeo gives us a detailed description of that cell, before she came out of it, while she conversed with no men save at the command or by the permission of her confessor. We see its door and window always closed, the hard couch of bare boards, the little lamps always burning day and night before the images of Christ, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the Saints which were painted there.¹ In words that curiously recall those of the *Vita Nuova*, but much less poetically and more crudely expressed, he tells us how—although he, too, was young, and evidently morbidly sensitive on this point—all carnal passion died away when he approached her, and that others, whose normal mode of thinking and feeling was quite alien from his own, had the same experience : " For her aspect and address seemed to pour forth a certain fragrance of purity, more angelical than human, and withal she was always joyful and merry of countenance." Even so had it been with Dante, when he went to behold the *nobili e laudabili fortamenti* of Beatrice : " And albeit her image, which kept continually with me, was a power of Love to rule over me,

¹ *Contestatio Fr. Bartkolomaei, Processus*, col. 1312.